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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 001493

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INR/IAA (BEN-YEHUDA)
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SUBJECT: HAITI: A REACTIVE LEGISLATURE

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¶1. (U) Summary. Haitian parliamentarians have worked within a democratic framework, forming coalitions across party lines to raise awareness to certain issues and negotiating with non-governmental organizations to start projects in their districts. Unfortunately, their agenda is largely driven by the executive branch. To date, the legislature has not crafted any new laws. If they are to play a larger role as legislators, they will have to be pro-active and move away from their current approach, reacting to the problem of the day. End Summary.

The Tenets of Democracy

¶2. (U) Though political parties are weak, party discipline unreliable, and many parliamentarians are new to national politics, democratic trends within the parliament have taken hold. Two large blocs emerged among the 18 political parties during the negotiations to confirm Prime Minister Alexis and approve his cabinet, and those blocs largely remained intact to form the parliamentary committees and elect their presidents. While political parties play the more important role in forming parliamentary coalitions on most issues, on some issues, regional or special interest coalitions exist. According to FUSION Senator Edmonde Supplice Beauzile, Vice President of the Senate, political party affiliation generally guides the decisions of a legislator, while the other coalitions are utilized as a lobbying unit on specific issues. For example, the female senators belong to a coalition and have agreed to press for women's rights or highlight the condition of women in relevant legislation.

¶3. The legislators also recognize that they have to bring money back into their district to remain in their positions. UNION Deputy Laurere Eduoard believes that Haitian citizens do not understand the role of legislators. "Parliamentarians are viewed as developing agents. If social projects are not realized in your community, you are a worthless parliamentarian." Thus, many parliamentarians spend their time negotiating with non-governmental organizations to start projects in their districts. They have big dreams for each of their communities and the list of projects to accomplish is long. In a series of meetings, every parliamentarian had hopes to acquire an industrial

park, construct a road, build a school, or erect a hospital. Unfortunately, these laundry lists have not translated into concrete plans of action.

A Reactive Legislature

¶4. The Legislature has not yet taken a proactive role in crafting legislation during this year's session. On August 9, Senator Beauzile told poloff that the Senate had not met as a body to consider any legislation. According to Beauzile, the Senate sent a letter to the Prime Minister at the beginning of July asking for his governance plan as well as legislative proposals. (Note: The Prime Minister is expected to deliver his governance plan, accompanied by the budget, mid-August. End Note.)

¶5. Beauzile agreed that the senate is waiting for the PM,s response and that no independent legislative agenda had been contemplated by the legislators. When asked about constitutional amendments, she felt it was too early to know what amendments would be proposed by parliamentarians. Yet, she insisted that they take their role of balancing power seriously. They have called on the ministers to present their plans of action for curbing fiscal waste, squashing gang violence, and improving cell-phone company interconnectivity (a major issue in Haiti). And despite their failure to focus on the legislative process, the Senate passed a resolution on July 21 condemning MINUSTAH and on August 1 unanimously forbid Senate President Lambert from participating in UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's visit.

¶6. The deputies have likewise formed their committees. However, not all of them have formally met. Deputy Marie Cluny Dumay of UNION said that the deputies face logistical problems in creating an agenda and meeting. They lack transportation to take them to and from Parliament and there

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are no offices or meeting rooms. Nonetheless, the committee presidents meet weekly to maintain communication.

¶7. Comment: Though legislators have not been quick off the mark, they are working within a democratic framework, forming coalitions across party lines and pressing the Executive on issues important to the constituency. However, the legislators are largely reactionary, having not promulgated any legislation on their own. If they are to play a larger role as legislators, they will have to be pro-active and move away from their current approach, responding only to the problem of the day. End Comment.

SANDERSON